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22 April 1966

PACIFICATION: THE OVERALL STRATEGY IN SOUTH VIETNAM

By

MAY 9 1966

U. S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE

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USAWC RESEARCH ELEMENT
(Essay)

Pacification: The Overall Strategy in South Vietnam

by

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22 April 1966

SUMMARY

Without an integrated strategy, it is difficult to conceive how the manifold aspects of counterinsurgency can be coordinated and made mutually supporting. Continuing GVN-US nonsuccess in bringing about a satisfactory settlement in South Vietnam points to the need for examining the in-country objectives and the strategy for achieving them. This essay reviews the current pacification strategy in South Vietnam to lay out its components and to examine its adequacy.

Pacification is not a new scheme cooked up by high-level strategists especially for the Vietnamese struggle. Instead, pacification is an accepted strategic concept which has been tested many times in a variety of insurgency situations. In its modern form, pacification was introduced in South Vietnam by the French shortly after World War II. They had achieved great success using "oil spot" pacification, under the direction of Marshal Lyautey, in North Africa at the turn of the century.

Since being first applied in South Vietnam in 1946, pacification has undergone a drastic process of forced evolution. By examining each watershed in this process, key concepts are isolated and principal reasons for lack of complete success are appraised. Likewise, a brief inspection of concurrent pacification campaigns successfully conducted in Malaya and the Philippines reveals concepts and techniques possibly suitable for the dissimilar circumstances found in South Vietnam.

Under the guidance of the Lao Dong Party, the enemy forces in Vietnam are carrying out their "armed struggle" using the well documented strategy of the "people's war." It is clear that the enemy objective is to win the support of the people in the countryside. There, they intend to use the people first to surround and eventually to take over the remaining or urban areas. Obviously, an appropriate counterstrategy is first to hold and strengthen the populous regions and then gradually to extend control over the people in the rural areas. This is what the current version of the pacification strategy, variously known as rural reconstruction or rural construction, seeks to accomplish.

There are some people who advocate a defensive pacification strategy--one best described as holding a number of strong enclaves anchored on the coast. However, the rural construction concept now being followed is basically an offensive strategy. Its success depends a great deal on destroying Viet Cong-PAVN combat potential (or at the very least keeping the enemy off balance and on the defensive) by land, air, and sea attacks against the entire enemy military and political structure.

This essay concludes that the current pacification strategy does provide the suitable integrating mechanism for accomplishing the tasks and the objectives in South Vietnam. However, it is necessary that it be accepted by all components of the friendly forces and applied with skill, determination, and attention to detail.

PACIFICATION: THE OVERALL STRATEGY IN SOUTH VIETNAM

In a remarkably frank Vietnamese equivalent to our President's State of the Union Message, Air Vice Marshall Nguyen Cao Ky, Prime Minister of the Republic of Vietnam and spokesman for the ruling Directorate of 11 military officers, stated that his government's emphasis for the Year of the Horse (1966) would be on "pacification." He said the aim was not only to root out the Viet Cong from the rural areas but also to root itself into these areas--and not for a short time but forever.¹ Premier Ky was telling the people of South Vietnam his strategy for combatting the Viet Cong--a strategy called pacification or, as variously referred to in recent South Vietnamese documents, rural reconstruction or rural construction.²

Pacification, a Little Known Concept.

Very little has been revealed in official announcements or documents about this pacification strategy being pursued in Vietnam. What is emphasized in press releases; in stories by the correspondents, who are providing detailed coverage of events as they unfold; or by casual observers of the Vietnamese scene scarcely uncovers the fundamental concepts governing the use of the considerable assets that the Republic of Vietnam, the United

¹Nguyen Cao Ky, as quoted by Charles Mohr, "Saigon's Premier Vows Early Move to Civilian Rule," New York Times, 16 Jan. 1966, p. 1.

²Republic of Vietnam, "Rural Reconstruction Department Receives Definition of Functions," Viet Nam Ban Nguyet-San, 26 Sep. 1965, p. 15.

States, and some thirty-odd other Free World Nations are devoting to the cause of freedom. Instead, the tactics employed in the conflict, whether they be tactics of a heliborne assault force, of a jungle patrol, of a district civil police element, or of a provincial propaganda team, are recounted frequently with such clarity and in such detail that a reader can quite easily grasp the true nature of the particular activity. The fleeting, sometimes brave, sometimes despicable enemy--the Viet Cong--is repeatedly and interestingly analyzed psychologically, politically, and militarily to the extent that the public's and the intelligence officer's understanding of Viet Cong methods are remarkably similar. Proper targets for bombing raids both inside South Vietnam and external to its borders in North Vietnam and Laos are critically debated in the news media. Relying on this base of general knowledge, it seems possible by setting forth the governing strategic concepts in South Vietnam, explaining how they have evolved, and describing how they are applied, that some useful illumination could be cast on the fundamental aspects of that complex conflict. Hopefully, the result will be a greater appreciation of the soundness of actions that have been taken by the US to assist the government of the Republic of Vietnam and its 15 million citizens.

Vietnamese - US Relationships.

At the outset it must be recognized that the US does not dictate the strategy in Vietnam. The Republic of Vietnam has a

functioning government headed now by proud military leaders who have positive nationalistic feelings. They possess as well considerable talent for formulating and carrying out an overall strategy aimed at returning their country to a peaceful state under a system chosen by the South Vietnamese people. They have the capability and the right to make the decisions affecting the future of their country--the country that still carries the bulk of the ground combat role with its own armed forces which still outnumber those of the US and other allied nations fighting in Vietnam by more than three to one.³ One needs only to compare the casualty figures for 1965--6,798 US fighting men killed, wounded, or missing versus 41,000 casualties among the South Vietnamese forces⁴--to judge the accuracy of the foregoing statement. Senator Mike Mansfield highlighted the preeminence of the South Vietnamese in determining policies when he stated recently, "The President, Gen. Westmoreland, and Ambassador Lodge have all emphasized time and time again that this war is primarily a South Vietnamese responsibility. We are there to assist the government and advise them if they request."⁵

³"Forces in Vietnam War Listed by Senate Report," New York Times, 9 Jan. 1966, p. 1.

⁴"U.S. War Toll in '65 at 1,450; Saigon's Is Estimated at 11,100," New York Times, 2 Jan. 1966, p. 22.

⁵Mike Mansfield, as quoted by Bryce Nelson, "Mansfield Disclaims Lull Role," Washington Post, 13 Jan. 1966, p. A14.

Pacification versus "People's War".

Besides being a combined strategy, the US-Republic of Vietnam strategy is very much a counterstrategy--one aimed at defeating a Communist inspired and instigated campaign for extending their own influence. Although a great deal has been said about Communist strategy for underdeveloped areas; much of it in boastful pronouncements by Communist leaders such as Nikita Khrushchev, Mao, Tse-tung, and Ho Chi Minh; it is useful to review briefly the essence of this strategy which must be successfully countered. It is assumed--with a fair margin of safety, for the purposes of the analysis presented, that the US will not suddenly adopt some new grand strategy that will wrest the worldwide initiative from the Communists and thereby force the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam-Democratic Republic of Vietnam clique into a counterstrategy itself.

Lin Piao, vice chairman of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, vice premier, and minister of defense, in a classic statement entitled "Long Live the Victory of the People's War"⁶ furnishes us with the most recent and bluntest statement of Mao Tse-tung's Chinese-style broad strategic concept which is being tested by the NLF-SVN-DRV in South Vietnam. Just by selecting certain of the topic headings in the statement and placing them in the context of South Vietnam, we perceive the strategic

⁶Lin Piao, "Long Live the Victory of the People's War," Foreign Broadcast Information Daily Report, No. 171 (4S), 3 Sep. 1965, pp. 1-33.

framework. That is: "Correctly Apply the Line and Policy of the United Front" which is exactly the purpose of the National Liberation Front; "Rely on the Peasants and Establish Rural Base Areas," a concept that has led to Viet Cong domination of perhaps 70 percent of the land and 23 percent of the population in South Vietnam,⁷ mostly in sparsely settled areas; "Build a People's Army of a New Type" typified by the resourceful Viet Cong guerrilla units; "Carry Out the Strategy and Tactics of the People's War" as regards all political-military operations; "Adhere to a Policy of Self-reliance"; all for the purpose of "Defeat/ing/ U.S. Imperialism and Its Lackeys With People's War" in South Vietnam.⁸ Lin Piao made it unmistakably clear that Peking's support of the Viet Cong was the focus of Red Chinese strategy aimed at "encirclement" of free world powers using revolutionary struggles in the world's "rural areas"--Asia, Africa, and Latin America--to overcome material advantages possessed by "cities of the world"--North America and Western Europe.⁹

The Need for an Integrated Strategy.

The recognized complex interrelationships of military, economic, social, psychological, and political aspects of any counterinsurgency campaign seem to call for, if not outright

⁷Jack Foisie, "Our Numbers Game Isn't Working," Washington Post, 26 Dec. 1965, p. E4.

⁸Piao, op. cit., p. 1.

⁹Ibid., p. 22.

demand, a common strategic concept--prescription if one prefers--that shapes and guides the efforts of all participating agencies. Given the particularly nasty situation in South Vietnam, with its deep-rooted contradictions, a very well organized and powerful enemy, and a weariness brought on by two decades of conflict, one can well imagine the difficulty found in developing a rational strategy favored by all factions.

Moreover, the US and several other nations are partners with the Republic of Vietnam in a combined undertaking; but, the partners do not look to a single, overall leader nor do they even have an integrated military staff. Also there is a natural tendency in an emergency to grasp immediate solutions to the most pressing issues rather than to postpone action until a long range plan can be developed, coordinated, perhaps tested, and finally implemented.

In addition, whenever it has come time to apply full-scale counterinsurgency measures, it seldom has been possible to derive a simple organizational arrangement--although the British committee system for the Malayan emergency on the surface looks tidy--for conducting government affairs even in the area of active counterinsurgency operations. In Vietnam, organizational difficulties, discounting the numerous coups-induced structural changes, have been fantastic and the search for solutions has occupied the US and South Vietnamese leaders continually. Finally, the constant power struggle between the armed forces

and civilian leaders has frequently impeded the joint, unbiased analysis of the overall problem by these two essential groups.

Rural Construction--The Current Pacification Concept.

Nevertheless, even though it took years, much patience, and a realization that the conflict had reached a critical point, a basic strategy for Vietnam has been developed. It does, more or less, shape and guide the manifold actions underway today contributing to the ultimate goals of peace and security in South Vietnam. General Westmoreland, the US Military Commander in Vietnam, has clearly enunciated this strategy, in a briefing for new US units arriving in South Vietnam, as follows:

Rural reconstruction /now known as rural construction/ is a broad area that encompasses almost all government directed activities in South Vietnam. One might think of rural reconstruction as consisting of two parts: defeating the Viet Cong political and military organization, and building a nation--in this case the Republic of South Vietnam--that can survive in the modern society of nations.

Normally a military force can go about the job of defeating an enemy without concerning itself concurrently with building a nation. On the other hand, the US aid program in most countries is not hampered by the presence of an enemy. In Vietnam the two activities are conducted simultaneously. Sometimes this is called counterinsurgency. Here this activity goes by the name of rural reconstruction.¹⁰

Pacification, or to use the newest term rural construction, as a strategy was not simply developed by planners in the

¹⁰William C. Westmoreland, Briefing for New US Units Arriving in South Vietnam, May 1964.

classical sense frequently followed in a conventional war, whereby the concept for achieving campaign objectives is worked out by a careful analysis of opposing capabilities, terrain, weather, etc. Instead, the South Vietnamese brand of pacification is the product of a violent evolutionary process of slightly more than 20 years duration. Furthermore, during the period of evolution, the enemy's or the insurgent's strategy, although keeping within the framework laid out by Mao, has also matured and undergone successive refinements.

Before discussing rural construction in more detail, it would be useful, therefore, to examine the essence of current Communist strategy in Vietnam and to review the different counterinsurgency strategies that have been previously attempted without progress or with only partial success.

The Enemy's Strategy in South Vietnam.

We do not have a blueprint entitled "National Liberation Front - Democratic Republic of Vietnam strategy for 1966." However, there are many clues, including captured Viet Cong documents and statements from defectors, that can be combined with Mao Tse-tung's theories, Vo Nguyen Giap's handbook,¹¹ and two decades of revolutionary warfare history in Indochina to yield a reasonably accurate picture. In simplest terms the Communists seek the following strategic objectives:

¹¹Vo Nguyen Giap, People's War People's Army, pp. 1-217.

1. To establish base areas in South Vietnam and ensure the security of the rear.

2. To organize large elements of the peasants under Communist control in order to deprive the Republic of Vietnam of their support and to provide manpower and supplies.

3. To use these manpower and supplies to build and maintain a large political cadre organization and powerful armed forces; to isolate the central government and the Americans politically by acquiring the active support or, at least, neutral position of all segments of the population in addition to controlling large elements of the peasants; and to divide and subvert the government leaders and the armed forces.

4. To cause the removal of American presence. (This objective explains the employment of PAVN units directly against US forces as a complement to propaganda and political action to make the American position untenable.)

French Pacification Efforts in Indochina.

Pacification (Vietnamese: binh dinh) is an old term. It was used by the French for describing their plan or strategy for wresting control of Indochina from the Viet Minh, led by Ho Chi Minh, after World War II. Military reoccupation of Indochina by French forces and political maneuvering with local leaders, including Ho Chi Minh himself, had failed to restore Indochina to its prewar colonial status under French domination. As a result, by late 1947, large-scale Viet Minh guerrilla zones,

largely impervious to thrusts by roadbound French armored and infantry units, flourished in the countryside. The war changed character from being merely a mop-up of outlaw bandits to a full-scale military campaign--a campaign that was to end seven years later at Dien Bien Phu.

Because so much of the rural countryside was being lost, the French patterned their first plan for reconquering the country on the successful experience of Marshal Lyautey in Algeria at the turn of the century. Lyautey described his concept of pacification by the "oil stain" analogy of spreading control progressively outward from areas controlled by friendly forces.

Lyautey's concept, when applied to Vietnam, hinged on occupation of territory using a network of outposts and forts,¹² a method thoroughly consistent with French military thinking at the time. In execution, the plan called for intensive military operations in a delimited area to shake the enemy's morale; followed by construction of numerous military posts to protect the civilian resettlement organization; and, finally, expansion of military operations from these posts in order to repeat the process. Great attention was given to pacifying areas along major roads and activating outposts along highways in order to keep the routes of communication open.¹³ Overlying, but not

¹²Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam, Tentative Directives on Rural Pacification Project, p. 11.

¹³Ibid.

closely integrated with pacification activities, was the search by French armed forces for the big set-piece battle in which they could outmaneuver and outgun the enemy in pitched battle. Because the outposts played into the hands of the guerrillas' tactics and because of inadequate resources, the plan failed and territorial control diminished alarmingly.

In May 1953, another of the constant crises in the French Cabinet that were occurring throughout the period of the French Indochina war, coupled with continued setbacks in the Red River Delta area around Hanoi, as well as in Laos, resulted in General Henri Navarre being sent to Indochina as Commander in Chief. Navarre changed the pacification strategy from defensive deployment of military forces in outposts to an offensive posture, perhaps designed more to protect his forces and rekindle their morale than to seize and pacify territory. He eschewed useless outposts and forts in order to remove easy targets for the Viet Minh. Forces remaining in the strengthened outposts and forts, Navarre ordered, would not sit passively waiting to destroy any guerrilla force who dared to attack as in earlier days but would undertake continuous operations in space and time.¹⁴ Once again, however, the French forces were tactically beaten repeatedly as their mobile units, often failing to maintain adequate security, were frequently severely ambushed and destroyed piecemeal.

¹⁴Ibid.

The complete destruction of Groupement Mobile No. 100, so vividly described by Dr. Bernard Fall in Street Without Joy,¹⁵ is an extreme, but not isolated, example of the failure of the Navarre plan. Territorial and population control continued to shrink alarmingly. Political support from France began to weaken. Eventually the military leaders found at Dien Bien Phu the set-piece battle they had been seeking. Instead of gaining victory through firepower, the French forces suffered a resounding tactical defeat. Political support collapsed and the French lost the Indochina war.

It should be noted that the French models of pacification strategy were not singularly unsuccessful. In the South, thanks to reliance on the religious sects--the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai, some good results were obtained. Because the sects' political (as well as religious) organizers, known as cadre in the Vietnamese experience, were local peasants; they understood well the local situation. They also had some sense of responsibility toward their neighbors. Therefore, in Tay Ninh Province the Cao Dai, and in An Giang and Chau Doc Provinces, the Hoa Hao, maintained a high degree of security.¹⁶ Yet over the long run, the French found it nearly impossible to control these anti-Viet Minh cadre spread out in the countryside. As a result, the cadre themselves eventually began to oppress the people who,

¹⁵Bernard B. Fall, Street Without Joy, pp. 169-230.

¹⁶Nguyen Huu Co, War Mission and Pacification Mission, p. 3.

though they had security, were gradually deprived of freedom and justice. The people finally threw in their lot with the Viet Minh who offered "liberation."

Victory in Malaya.

Meanwhile, in other parts of Southeast Asia, successful examples of pacification were drawing attention. In Malaya the British and loyal Malaysians joined during the emergency lasting from 1950 to 1958 to defeat decisively a Communist inspired insurgency. Much of the pacification effort was devoted to isolating the Communist terrorists (a name specifically chosen to deprive the insurgents of the glamor attached to the guerrilla label) from the population and cutting off their only sources of food and other supplies. Thus, government forces were able to deal first with guerrilla bands, and ultimately with individual terrorists identified by name and description or even photograph, area by area until the insurgent activity was reduced to the level of the background crime rate.

Through the scheme of organizing "new villages," the population in remote and insecure areas was gathered, controlled, and provided new economic and social benefits. One point requires emphasis to contrast the Malayan experience with later experiences in Vietnam: the people moving into new villages found conditions in terms of housing, public utilities, schools, health and sanitation, and, most important, security better than

in their former home villages.¹⁷ So successful was this system that similarly effective population and resources control has been widely accepted, although not necessarily validly, as the sine qua non for winning in any counterinsurgency situation.

Throughout the Malayan emergency, military and civilian police forces, in roughly equal numbers, coordinated with considerable effectiveness--that gradually increased with time--their strength and their experience to provide excellent security for new villages. The pacification forces were able to prevent all but a dribble of supplies from reaching the terrorists. They were thus able to isolate the enemy mainly in the jungles--there to destroy him by encirclement or ambush. Statistics kept with religious-like fervor show that ambushes accounted for a majority of the terrorists killed or captured.¹⁸ Much of the Malayan experience, as will be pointed out, has been applied to the Vietnamese conflict, often without full recognition of salient dissimilarities in conditions under which the two counterinsurgencies have been undertaken.

Although the British experience in Malaya approximates the physical environment of the fighting in South Vietnam, it is totally different in the sociological, political, and ethnic factors so crucial to winning in an insurgency situation. First, and above all, Malaya had no common border with a Communist, or

¹⁷R. G. K. Thompson, Personal interview, 5-12 Jun. 1964.

¹⁸Claude H. Fenner, Personal interview, 10 Jun. 1964.

even neutralist, country. In fact, there was a cooperative venture by the Thais and the British to police Malaya's short northern border.¹⁹ Moreover, in Malaya the terrorists came from the Chinese minority alone--and within that segment only the some 400 thousand squatters who had nothing to lose but their illicitly acquired rice fields could be counted on to give support to the Communist terrorists.²⁰

Success in the Philippines.

Another example of Western success in Southeast Asia is the victorious Filipino-American counterinsurgency action against the Huks from 1947 to 1952. A veteran of that struggle, retired Major General Edward Lansdale, along with several of his former coworkers in the Philippines like Colonels Charles T. R. Bohannon and Napoleon D. Valeriano, now operates in a special advisory capacity between the US Mission in Saigon and the Vietnamese government officials engaged in pacification.²¹ General Lansdale identified the feature lesson of the campaign against the Huks when he said that "purely military tactics failed completely to stop the Huks."²² The chance for pacification to succeed came when Ramon Magsaysay became defense minister and applied political measures, with considerable talent and

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Bernard B. Fall, The Two Viet-Nams, p. 339.

²¹ John Maffre, "Lansdale Team in Vietnam Careful to Avoid Limelight," Washington Post, 11 Dec. 1965, p. 6.

²² Edward G. Lansdale, as quoted by Fall, The Two Viet-Nams, p. 342.

persuasive, dynamic leadership, in conjunction with military activities. He skillfully championed purging dishonest officials and eradicating corrupt practices in rural areas. He further undermined the enemy cause by promoting land reform, giving assistance to the peasants, and preventing oppression and exploitation of the poor. He coped with the enemy's forces by activating small counterguerrilla units that were trained to apply the unconventional tactics called for by the nature of the terrain and the characteristics of the enemy.

Ngo Dinh Diem Searches for a Solution.

Turning back to the problem in South Vietnam, one finds there, according to General Lansdale, "the worst features of the other theaters in which the West has had to fight Communism thus far" and, compounding the difficulties, "an enemy who has not only read all the classics of guerrilla warfare, but also added a few chapters of his own."²³ Although the Viet Cong oozed out from their hiding places to harass the Diem government through disaffection, agitation, propaganda, and occasional terroristic acts as early as 1957, the problems of establishing a new nation attracted practically the full capacity of the Saigon regime. Circumstances practically precluded a coordinated campaign of action against the emerging Viet Cong, perhaps at the very time when they were not well organized and quite vulnerable.

²³Bernard B. Fall, The Two Viet-Nams, p. 339.

By the end of 1958, the Viet Cong had increased their offensive to the point where security in the countryside, particularly in the Mekong Delta region, had become a serious problem and the Diem government was in trouble.

As a partial answer, on 7 July 1959, President Ngo Dinh Diem announced via radio to the people of South Vietnam that:

. . . this year I propose to create densely populated settlement areas /to be known as agrovilles/ in the countryside. . . . These settlement areas will not only improve the life of the rural population, but they will also constitute the economic units which will play an important role in the future development of the country as a whole.²⁴

The compelling security motivation behind the agroville program became evident a week later when, in a letter to Province Chiefs, the Minister of Interior announced:

The reason for this work /on the agrovilles/ is that the population . . . is living in such spread out manner that the government cannot protect them and they are obliged to furnish supplies to the Viet Cong. Therefore it is necessary to concentrate this population, especially the families who have children still in the North or who are followers of the Viet Cong.²⁵

Eighty central agrovilles--khu tru mat in Vietnamese, meaning "prosperous dense center"--were envisaged with whatever number of satellite communities that would be necessary.²⁶

Unfortunately the agrovilles, even with other concurrent development programs including general land reform, limiting

²⁴Joseph J. Zasloff, Rural Resettlement in Vietnam, p. 1.

²⁵Ibid., p. 2.

²⁶Ibid., p. 9.

land holding to 100 hectares plus ancestral burial grounds, did not constitute an effective total counterinsurgency plan. The government, furthermore, simply did not have the means to accomplish the plan of relocating half a million people and improving their economic standards simultaneously. Not only did the Viet Cong inhibit the construction of agrovilles by violent as well as nonviolent acts; but, the rural people involved bitterly opposed the corvee labor system used, disliked being uprooted from their ancestral homesites, and failed to respond genuinely to the Government's attempt to spark local political involvement. As the security situation grew worse in 1961, the agroville program gave way to the strategic hamlet program as the core of the counterinsurgency effort. At the same time, President Kennedy, reasserting the US commitment, stepped up American military and economic aid.

December 1960, it may be remembered, marked a turning point insofar as the Viet Cong were concerned. It was at this time that the establishment of the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam and its goals, which included reunification of all Vietnam, were announced. In effect, the Viet Cong, feeling their growing strength, had come into the open.

The Strategic Hamlet Program.

Although the concept of strategic hamlets was not new-- President Diem himself having pointed out that it was adopted centuries ago by the Vietnamese villages seeking to protect

themselves against Chinese bandits²⁷--it was introduced in its modern form notably by R. G. K. Thompson, President Diem's British advisor. Thompson had served as Secretary of Defense under Templer in Malaya during the emergency there and had helped create the "new villages." It is only fair to point out that Thompson offered Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, a total plan for combatting the Viet Cong. He advocated adopting tactics that conformed to the rural situation and which would force the Viet Cong to fight on the Government's terms, not vice versa. The basic elements of Thompson's strategy of pacification included:²⁸

1. Undertaking intensive military operations to prevent enemy main forces from concentrating.
2. Activating carefully planned strategic hamlets at a rate consistent with capabilities to support and protect them.
3. Expanding the area of government control by "clear and hold" operations aimed at destroying not so much the enemy's forces but primarily his political-military organizations through which he was seeking to dominate the area.
4. Organizing guerrilla-type operations in the VC controlled areas to harass the enemy, particularly using ambush techniques. (Thompson recalled that in Malaya more terrorists

²⁷Robert Shaplen, The Lost Revolution, p. 165.

²⁸Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam, Tentative Directives on Rural Pacification Project, p. 13.

were killed in ambushes than by attacks and fixed defenses combined.)²⁹

5. Controlling VC axis of communication and the supply routes from the North.

6. Avoiding "fix and destroy" operations, otherwise known as "sweeps," which had proved so useless in Malaya as well as in Vietnam.

Early in 1962, the strategic hamlet plan was adopted in South Vietnam with great fervor "in order to carry out a political, economic, and social revolution to solve the problems of underdevelopment, division, and Communism."³⁰ The rural areas were to be the major objectives of the revolution; the strategic hamlets were to be the points of departure for the revolution.

Instead of going slowly, Ngo Dinh Nhu, appointed by President Diem to head the program, went in for mass production in the interest of projecting government presence and political influence into as many places as possible. Although Thompson had cautioned to start expanding from relatively secure areas, Nhu chose to make the first major effort to develop strategic hamlets, labeled Operation Sunrise, in Viet Cong dominated territory along Highway 13 north of Saigon. Nhu thought he could cut off the VC stronghold known as War Zone D from Saigon to

²⁹Thompson, op. cit.

³⁰Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam, Tentative Directives on Rural Pacification Project, p. 15.

the south and from the Cambodian border to the west.³¹ Instead of making progress, Operation Sunrise, because of improper application of the strategic concept, completely inadequate preparation, and repressive measures taken against the people, was a failure. Failing to profit from their initial mistakes, most Vietnamese officials pushed on with the same program at an accelerating rate eventually "completing" over 8,000 strategic hamlets in less than two years.³² The hamlets, which were supposed to be anti-Communist centers of resistance, frequently turned out to be more anti-government than anti-Communist. When checking "completed" hamlets carried on Saigon records, field inspectors frequently discovered that reports were incorrect or plainly dishonest. (For example, American advisors in the fall of 1963 considered only four out of 48 hamlets reported as completed in An Xuyen Province as viable in the sense that they were firmly on the Government's side and could be protected with the forces that were available.)³³ But, the myth that many thousands of hamlets were complete was allowed to grow.

One remarkable aspect of President Diem's strategy was the introduction of an ideological doctrine called Personalism to replace the Communist thesis rather than merely attacking Communism as unsound. Regardless of whether Personalism itself

³¹Denis Warner, The Last Confucian, p. 34.

³²William A. Smith, "The Strategic Hamlet Program in Vietnam," Military Review, Vol. 44, May 1964, p. 23.

³³The Author, Personal inspection notes, Oct. 1963.

was sound, though many Vietnamese intellectuals today will say that it was a useful, appealing doctrine, it never did exert extensive influence among the peasants. For one reason, the cadres of the Can Lao Party (led by Ngo Dinh Nhu) were not well enough qualified to develop Personalism's complex theses in the rural areas. Furthermore, the cadres--many of whom came from the cities--were dishonest and used their power for themselves rather than for the national cause.³⁴ Nhu and his brother, the President, failed to listen to the many complaints and suggestions for improving the government machinery. They failed to police the Can Lao party ranks. As a result, there were many injustices that were seized upon by the Viet Cong. The VC not only removed the cause of the injustices by obliterating the local government organization but promised brotherhood and justice under their own system once ultimate victory could be achieved. Thus, the Viet Cong promises were made credible through the evident removal of the Can Lao cadreman, perhaps in the person of a corrupt village or hamlet chief, who was the source of local grievances. There is little doubt that the failure to implant all that Personalism stood for among the masses contributed to the bankruptcy of the strategic hamlets.

General Khanh Introduces the Chien Thang Plan.

Following the coup d'etat of November 1 and 2, 1963, the Viet Cong took advantage of the period of transition and the

³⁴Co, op. cit., p. 4.

inward focus of the ruling military junta on political problems at the center to step up their offensives throughout the countryside. As so aptly stated in the Mansfield Report, "In the period following the fall of the government of Ngo Dinh Diem, the so-called pacification or civic action program . . . was allowed in large measure to lapse."³⁵ In fact, nearly 80 percent of the hamlets reported as "completed" crumbled and were either reoccupied by the VC or simply chose a neutral position of watching and waiting for a victor to emerge.

General Nguyen Khanh, who deposed the November group in a 30 January 1964 coup of his own, frankly acknowledged the difficulty of altering the outlook of a tired and disillusioned people and of waging battle against an increasingly strong Viet Cong organization. In his "Program of Action," proclaimed in mid-March 1964, he announced a general plan to save the country by mobilizing all able-bodied citizens and by reorganizing the former strategic hamlets by giving up the isolated and overextended ones and concentrating on improving security and living standards in those that were to be retained.³⁶ More importantly, he approved an integrated military-civilian campaign plan drawn up by officers on the Vietnamese Joint General Staff and members of the civilian ministries, with assistance from American

³⁵Mike Mansfield, and others, "Vietnam Conflict: The Substance and Shadow," Washington Post, 9 Jan. 1966, pp. A22-23.

³⁶Nguyen Khanh, as quoted by Shaplin, The Lost Revolution, p. 238.

advisors. The plan laid out a new strategy applicable to the realities of the situation. It was called the Chien Thang (Victory) Plan³⁷ and not only established meaningful priorities but adopted the "oil slick" or "oil spot" theory of Marshal Lyautey. According to the plan, secure areas would be first strengthened to become viable bases or "oil spots" and then control would be gradually expanded from secure to less secure areas, from populous to less populous areas, and generally along important lines of communication (highways, rivers and canals, and the National Railroad).

The Chien Thang Plan, although not complete in detail and essentially untested, was a total plan combining all civil and military aspects and resources of the pacification effort for the first time. Its forerunner, the strategic hamlet program, had been hampered by having two separate campaigns: the civil-paramilitary effort to develop hamlets, and a National Campaign Plan governing the employment of the armed forces. Because the leaders of the armed forces and the civilian ministers did not have the same strategic objectives in mind, this separation of plans turned out to be a serious flaw. At least with the Chien Thang Plan the common objectives were clear. Moreover, the armed forces leaders, now imposed over the civilian ministries, were in a position to direct the overall efforts of the country.

³⁷Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam, Chien Thang National Pacification Plan (U), TOP SECRET.

The new Chien Thang Plan was hastily put into effect during the spring of 1964. Even several months later, however, the desired changes specified in the plan were not generally manifest in the countryside. In most instances, the implementing plans issued by corps, division, and province looked like the old strategic hamlet plans with a new identifying legend. Means allocated and time-phased results demanded seemed to US planners to be entirely unrelated. Although priority areas were identified in the national plan (actually 8 provinces were classified as "critical"), examination of provincial plans after they had been prepared showed that each province chief seemed to be under the illusion that his province had top priority. Almost all of the supporting plans were developed too rapidly with too little coordination across provincial or tactical zone boundaries.

Even with the faulty and hastily developed supporting plans and scarcely any attention to the selection of priorities, the execution of the Chien Thang Plan brought about a significant increase in the operational activity of the armed forces. US advisors observed much greater effort on the part of many province and district chiefs to protect and to improve the areas that were still under their control. The alarming loss to the Viet Cong of control over the people experienced since President Diem's death was arrested by the summer of 1964. At the same time, results from relatively successful pacification experiences in selected localities, notably in the IV Corps area of the Mekong Delta, began to become available for evaluation.

Lessons Learned and Lessons Applied.

In the delta, the successful local military commanders and district and province chiefs came to realize that progress depended on proper application of certain fundamental principles such as:

1. Strengthen ones base, that is, the essential government controlled areas, first before attempting to expand the zone of control.
2. Eliminate static outposts that are liabilities and give up difficult to protect remote areas in order to generate sufficient mobile forces to wrest the offensive from the Viet Cong in the local area.
3. Adhere to the "oil spot" concept of gradually extending the zone of control. Patience is absolutely essential; the pacification process cannot be ruled.
4. Pacification forces--civilian and military--must identify themselves with the peasants whom they are protecting by taking a leaf from the insurgents' handbook and "living among the people."
5. While resources for pacification are allocated from above, detailed planning using resources provided can be suitably accomplished only from the bottom up.

Just as important as identifying the essential principles was the recognition by high government officials, including General Khanh and later Premier Quat, that resource limitations

demanded strict attention be given to adopting meaningful priorities. It was patently impossible, with a force preponderance over the VC of something like 3.5 to 1, to undertake general expansion of control in the delta, in the highlands and in the coastal lowlands simultaneously. One suggestion by US advisors to the planners in Saigon was to adopt the priorities described below:

Area by Priority	Basic Plan	Plan by Zone		
		Government Base	Contested Zone	Viet Cong Base
1. Saigon and adjacent provinces	Expand	Strongly support development, limited expansion	Increase government activity, weaken VC structure	Step up pressure with view toward reduction in influence
2. Central Lowlands	Hold	Protect to prevent further loss	Increase activity to match VC	Maintain pressure to prevent expansion
3. Central Highlands	Hold	Protect areas required to prevent loss of Montagnard support	Maintain <u>status quo</u>	Maintain pressure to prevent expansion
4. South Delta (below Bassac River)	Contract	Relinquish control in unimportant areas	Allow to increase in extent	Accept slight expansion in selected areas

In part, the advice was accepted. Saigon and its immediate environs--Gia Dinh, Hau Nghia, Binh Duong, and Long An Provinces--

were assigned "top priority" and a major pacification operation called Hop Tac (Vietnamese for coordination and cooperation) was started in October 1964. However, the unwillingness, or perhaps the political inability, of the central government to "put money on its bet" by assigning sufficient resources to Hop Tac doomed the plan to achieve indecisive results. Even though an additional division was transferred into the area around Saigon, other compensating troop movements resulted in an actual decrease in strength by two battalions in the Hop Tac area. Less than two-thirds of estimated troop requirements were assigned; reserves were also depleted to meet the expanding Viet Cong threat in the Central Highlands. In some cases, there was expansion which was achieved simply by moving lines on a map without changing the balance between government and Viet Cong control on the ground. Nevertheless, Hop Tac experiences added to the growing realization among government officials that pacification was a long, difficult task requiring paper priorities to be backed in fact with long term assignment of adequate resources. (Note: Hop Tac continues today as the top priority pacification area with US forces of the 1st Infantry Division and the 173rd Airborne Brigade making up force deficiencies.)

As a result of the aforementioned experiences, there no longer seems to be any doubt that the overriding objective in South Vietnam is to win control of and support, whether completely willing or not, from the people in the rural areas. The leaders

of the country fully understand the detailed, painstaking approach that must be taken to accomplish this objective. General Nguyen Huu Co, deputy director of the ruling military directorate behind General Ky, has recently described the battle for control of the people in terms of a clever analogy. He likens the village in Vietnam to a patient that has been under the care of two doctors: The Red Doctor and the Green Doctor.³⁸

Before sending the Red Doctor to the village, Ho Chi Minh taught him how to feel the pulse of a patient and how to cure the types of illness prevalent in the village. However, the doctor was very poor having only black pajamas, sandals made from a worn out rubber tire, and a bag of rice plus his curing techniques. Upon arriving in the village, the doctor would visit several families having the sickest patients, particularly among the poor. After feeling the patient's pulse, the doctor would know from his training how to cure the illness he discovered. For those who needed more land, the Red Doctor would take some from a landowner; for those who were victims of corrupt officials, he would take revenge against those officials. Since the prescriptions were correct, the patients soon recovered and lauded the work of the good doctor among their neighbors not knowing that they were spreading the Communist propaganda.

³⁸Co, op. cit., pp. 6-8.

On the other hand, Free World Nations--the South Vietnamese, French, and Americans--sent another kind of physician to the villages. This was the Green Doctor, personified by pacification cadre. The Green Doctor had been given hurried training and, because he was not confident in his capability, he was reluctant even to go into the rural areas. Usually following the Red Doctor, the Green Doctor would arrive with a truck loaded with modern medicines, clothing, candy, and sometimes money for schools and dispensaries. Since he was not confident in his ability, he hesitated to see the patients with serious illnesses. Instead, he visited the people with minor ailments--the wealthy, the village school teacher, or members of the Regional and Popular Forces. For the seriously sick, the doctor, not being trained in internal medicine, could only give gifts of candy and money to win their esteem. Unfortunately, these prescriptions could not cure the sickness and, after the candy and money were used up, the patients' conditions remained the same. Worst of all, "whenever higher authorities made an inspection tour in some village and asked if the patients had improved, the Green Doctor replied that everything was fine."³⁹

This remarkably frank appraisal demonstrates that any pacification strategy must be applied with considerable attention to details. To have any chance of success, there must be a complete set of doctrine and techniques for correcting the ills of the

³⁹Ibid., p. 8.

people as well as for engaging the enemy's military formations. The trained civilian administrators, policemen, and soldier to apply the doctrine and techniques skillfully and honestly are essential.

Although lip service has been paid to many of the fundamental elements of pacification in the past, there no longer seems to be any doubt that the Vietnamese leaders recognize the necessity for directing full and continuous attention to the kind of details so persuasively outlined by General Co. Prime Minister Ky, in his 1966 state of the union message, clearly identified that the struggle would ultimately be decided by pacification of the rural areas.⁴⁰ Further, in a recent meeting of Vietnamese province chiefs, the chiefs themselves concluded, "During the past we have failed to carry out the pacification program because we have had many defects in its implementation."⁴¹

Factors Affecting Rural Construction.

Two new factors profoundly modify today's pacification equation. If the previous strategies have been simply called pacification strategies, then the current rural construction strategy is a reinforced or extended pacification strategy. The reinforcing or extension factors are of course the US combat forces operating in South Vietnam and the combined US-South Vietnamese actions

⁴⁰Nguyen Cao Ky, as quoted by Ward Just, "Ky Regime Shows Signs of Independence," Washington Post, 17 Jan. 1966, p. A15.

⁴¹Republic of Vietnam, Summary Report to Assembled Representatives . . ., 12 Oct. 1965, pp. 1-2.

outside the borders consisting of bombings against targets in the DRV and an anti-infiltration sea patrol off the coast of South Vietnam.

Bombing the North began in February 1965, a short time before the introduction of the first US ground combat units. Except for one five-day pause beginning 13 May 1965, and a prolonged 37-day interruption starting Christmas Eve 1965, increasingly intense attacks on the infiltration routes and military targets supporting infiltration have been conducted over an ever widening portion of the DRV homeland. The purposes of these attacks are threefold: to give the people of South Vietnam a feeling that the source of aggression against them is being attacked, thus raising their morale; to interrupt infiltration and to make the movement of men and materials by the DRV much more difficult and expensive; and to remind the leaders in Hanoi that they must pay an ever rising price for continuing to support aggression against the South.

The need to cut the sea routes to the South was dramatically revealed on 19 February 1965 when a steel-sided, 100-ton cargo ship, carrying enough equipment to outfit an entire Viet Cong battalion, was caught and destroyed in Vung Ro Bay.⁴² As a result, Operation Market Time is being carried out as a coordinated effort by the US and South Vietnamese Navies to deny enemy

⁴²US Dept of State, Aggression From the North: The Record of North Vietnam's Campaign to Conquer South Vietnam, pp. 15-19.

use of the seaward areas off the coasts of South Vietnam. Even though infiltration of entire PAVN units of regimental or even division size has occurred since these anti-infiltration measures were taken, there is no doubt that these actions have significantly hampered North Vietnam's total capacity to step up the intensity of the war in the South.

The word pacification has a defensive connotation. However, the present rural construction version of pacification is definitely not defensive in nature. In fact, the successful pursuit of the strategy requires what amounts to a two-front offensive. One front consists of continuous spoiling operations against Viet Cong base areas, primarily those strongholds nearest GVN centers of strength such as Saigon, Da Nang and the Coastal Lowlands to its south, and Pleiku and the communications network in its vicinity. Powerful, mobile US combat units have played a significant role in this type of operation since the summer of 1965. The objective of the US forces, according to General Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "is to defeat, together with the Vietnamese forces, the main-force Viet Cong units and the North Vietnamese forces that have been introduced. . . ."⁴³ In order for any meaningful pacification to be possible, these offensive operations must be sufficiently remunerative to frustrate the Communist attempts to increase

⁴³Earle G. Wheeler, "Excerpts from testimony by General Wheeler before the Senate Armed Service Committee as released 22 Jan. 1966," U.S. News and World Report, Vol. LX, 1 Feb. 1966, p. 29.

their strength proportionately faster than the combined US and GVN buildup. They must as well keep the Viet Cong off balance and on the defensive.

At the same time as the military offensive takes place in Viet Cong areas, the second front campaign to protect, develop, and eventually expand the secure government areas--the GVN base--must be effectively waged. Even more so than in the military or first-front offensive, this second front presents classic difficulties from the viewpoint of past experiences in Vietnam. Nevertheless, the ingredients for successfully winning the people are well known. Slowly, the GVN, assisted by the US, is learning the best recipe for blending the ingredients in the proper sequence and correct proportions.

The Enclave Alternative.

Considerable controversy has recently erupted over the feasibility and desirability of pressing an offensive pacification strategy. Some strategists, such as retired Lieutenant General James M. Gavin, suggest holding several enclaves along the coast of South Vietnam where US sea and air power can be made fully effective.⁴⁴ The concept envisions strongly defending bases such as Saigon, Cam Ranh Bay, Da Nang, and similar areas containing the heaviest concentration of population. It could--a point overlooked by some critics--involve limited

⁴⁴James M. Gavin, "A Communication on Vietnam," Harper's, Vol. 232, Feb. 1966, p. 16.

counteroffensive operations from the enclaves by ground attack, air-mobile foray, or amphibious landing against Viet Cong units or enemy held areas.

The enclave theory has attractive features. With US air and sea power securing the enclaves, it would be virtually impossible for the Viet Cong to overrun one of the enclaves Dien Bien Phu style. There would be plenty of time to solve the many internal problems in South Vietnam. Furthermore, the population distribution favors the plan since with five or six relatively large enclaves more than one-half of the people (not counting those living in the Mekong Delta) could be afforded positive security. On the other hand, there would be grave strategic dangers. The initiative would be lost to the enemy who would have all the time required to consolidate his bases in the rural areas with their considerable manpower and agricultural resources. As one analyst puts it, the US image would be degraded to that of "paper tigers in bamboo cages."⁴⁵ The simple fact is that the enclave concept was considered by Vietnamese and US planners at the time US forces were first introduced and rejected as being much less advantageous than the current offensive pacification strategy.

⁴⁵Max S. Johnson, "More Men - And Bombing," U.S. News and World Report, Vol. LX, 7 Feb. 1966, p. 29.

Conclusions.

Regardless of the exact form of the pacification strategy followed in South Vietnam, several conclusions emerge from the foregoing historical analysis and a strategic appraisal of the current situation.

1. Pacification is not something new cooked up to solve present conditions in South Vietnam. Rather the rural construction version now being pursued is the product of many years of trial and error in Vietnam and in other insurgency plagued countries.

2. Since pacification is in reality a counterstrategy to change the direction of a Communist-style revolution, it automatically is beset with tremendous barriers. Thus to surmount these barriers, a considerable preponderance of effort--military, police, and economic--is required on the part of the counterinsurgents. There is no magic formula for determining the necessary preponderance. However, it is evident in the military sector that a force advantage of less than 4 to 1 over the enemy is insufficient in South Vietnam.

3. Pacification, considered properly in the broad sense, encompasses the total aspects of the counterinsurgency effort in the rural areas. Therefore, it provides a useful and necessary tool for integrating and coordinating the manifold components of the activities of the GVN, the US, and other Free World nations in Vietnam.

4. Borrowing from a Vietnamese slogan, "substance not form is important" in pacification. In fact, much of the Viet Cong's success can be attributed to attention to the substance of their "people's war" theory. Therefore, it is imperative that the government's program be carried out with equal regard to details.

5. Adequate doctrine now is available and techniques are well enough known to conduct a successful pacification campaign. Vietnamese government leaders have demonstrated their understanding of past errors and future requirements. Others before them have been equally perceptive, but their execution of earlier pacification programs was clumsy and generally unsuccessful except for a few isolated examples of real progress. Success under the present leadership will largely depend on skillful, resolute execution at every government echelon coupled with understanding, unswerving US assistance.

6. A defensive strategy based on the enclave concept would be dangerous and perhaps self-defeating.

7. One veteran reporter of the Vietnamese scene summed up his view of the present situation as follows: "... the American and South Vietnamese participants in this gigantic effort seem bewildered. They appear to be strenuously pursuing tactics without understanding strategy for the reason that a

realistic, feasible objective for this war still eludes definition."⁴⁶ The pacification concept offers the suitable objectives and the strategy for obtaining them. It, therefore, seems to offer a solution to the dilemma in South Vietnam.

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⁴⁶Stanley Karnow, "Despite Staggering Commitment, Goals Appear Cloudy in Saigon," Washington Post, 3 Feb. 1966, p. 1.

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